



Joint Work Session for Open Space in New Development

Joint Work Session of the Planning Commission, Park and Recreation Commission,
and Environmental Policy Commission

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May 20, 2019

7:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.

Charles Houston Recreation Center, Multi-Purpose Room
901 Wythe Street

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Agenda

May 20, 2019

7:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.

Charles Houston Recreation Center, Multi-Purpose Room
901 Wythe Street

I.	Welcome & Introductions	7:30 p.m.
II.	Open Space in New Development	7:30 – 8:45 p.m.
	a. Summary of Open Space Process	
	b. Shared Expectations for Open Space Discussion	
III.	Summary of Publicly Accessible Open Space Policy Process	8:45 – 8:55 p.m.
IV.	Update of EAP Actions for Land Use and Open Space Actions	8:55 – 9:00 p.m.
V.	Other Discussion Items	9:00 – 9:15 p.m.
VI.	Public Comment Period	9:15 – 9:30 p.m.
VII.	Closing Statements & Adjournment	9:30 p.m.



Joint Work Session for Open Space in New Development

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Commissions Roster

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901 Wythe Street

Planning Commission Members

Nathan Macek, Chair
Maria Wasowski, Vice Chair
David Brown, Commissioner
John Goebel, Commissioner

Stephen Koenig, Commissioner
Mindy Lyle, Commissioner
Melissa McMahon, Commissioner

Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) Members

Jennifer Atkins, Chair, Planning District II
Gina Baum, Planning District I
Liz Birnbaum, Planning District I
Barbara Marvin, Planning District I
Stephen Beggs, Planning District II
Joey Farmery, Planning District II

Judith Coleman, Planning District III
Abby Froemming, Planning District III
Brian McPherson, Planning District III
Ashley Marie Sanchez-Viafara, Youth
Representative
Connor Rex, Youth Representative

Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) Members

Praveen Kathpal, Chair
James Kapsis, Vice Chair
Craig Berry, Commissioner
Elisabeth Bradley, Commissioner
Eldon Boes, Commissioner
Geoffrey Goode, Commissioner

James Hook, Commissioner
Leslie Jones, Commissioner
Michael Kulas, Commissioner
Brendan Owens, Commissioner
Carolyn Schroeder, Commissioner
Reid Sherman, Commissioner

**Not all commissioners may be present at the May 20, 2019 Joint Work Session.*

Open Space in New Development Joint Work Session – Introduction

The open space in new development discussion series originated from the Planning Commission and City Council's desire to understand the criteria staff uses to assess open space in new development. The process has evolved into a three-part, open discussion series with the Planning Commission, as well as the Park and Recreation Commission (PRC), and Environmental Policy Commission (EPC). To date, two discussions have been held in the Open Space in New Development series in February and April with the Planning Commission. These discussions were presented in summary discussions with the EPC and PRC in April and May.

This Joint Work Session with the Planning Commission, Environmental Policy Commission, and Park and Recreation Commission provides an opportunity for an open and iterative discussion about the third and final discussion with the Planning Commission where the Shared Expectations will be considered, including the establishment of work items for the implementation of these expectations.

City Staff have generated a draft listing of Shared Expectations as a starting point for the discussion. These Shared Expectations are a direct outgrowth of the preceding discussions and feedback from the Planning Commission, EPC, and PRC from the various presentations and meetings. Additionally, they address the "commonalities" that were presented as lessons learned from successful open spaces in recent new developments within the City of Alexandria.

[Open Space Session 1 Presentation](#)

[Open Space Session 2 Presentation](#)

The purpose of the Joint Work Session is for Commissioners to be able to discuss their thoughts. The activity for the meeting will center on three primary questions in regard to the Shared Expectations, which City Staff suggest the Commissioners prepare to address. These are: of the Shared Expectations listed, are there any topics that appear to be missing; are there any Shared Expectations that should not be included, and; are there any Shared Expectations that are the correct topic but need to be reworked?

Open Space in New Development Shared Expectations

I. Introduction

Open space in new development is guided by Citywide policies and plans and the relevant small area plan. Citywide plans, such as the Open Space Master Plan and Landscape Guidelines, and policy documents such as the Environmental Action Plan, provide citywide guidance on expectations for open space in new development. Individual small area plans use those citywide plans and policies to provide more specific guidance for new development within the plan area.

The Shared Expectations created through this process will be utilized to guide the amendment of current practices, policies, and regulations for open space in new development. This may include the creation of guidelines to be utilized in the review of development cases and text amendments to the zoning ordinance, where desired.

The Zoning Ordinance's open space quantity requirements are generally correct, but there are opportunities for refinement. Combined with open space quantity requirements in Small Area Plans, the City's open space quantity goals are being met. Future work should look at some refinements, including:

- Whether open space quantity requirements should vary, to any degree, with density.
- Whether similar zones (RB and RM, for example) should have similar open space quantify requirements
- Whether the "8-foot rule" should be amended in historic districts to encourage the retention of small spaces between buildings.
- Whether further definition of the term "open space" may be beneficial.

II. Shared Expectations

A. It is desirable for open space in new development to achieve all four "roles:" form-defining, visual relief, outdoor living, and environmental benefit:

- **Form-defining** means: the open space and building(s) of a new development are designed as a wholistic system where they inform the shapes and volumes of each other.
- **Visual relief** means: the open space provides sufficient distance or setback between buildings within the development or adjacent structures to provide clear separation between masses and/or the provision of light.
- **Outdoor living** means: the provision of essential resources such as shade and seating in combination with passive and recreational activity spaces or features that encourage the animated use of the open space.
- **Environmental benefit** means: the provision of green infrastructure to meet the regulatory requirements and policy goals of the City and State for canopy cover and stormwater management and quality.

- B. **New development has an important role in the provision of public and public-private open space.**
- Through the Small Area Plan process, the locations, quantities, and programming for public and public-private open spaces may be established based on the community needs and the projected impacts of development in these areas.
 - New development projects that are unable to meet their required open space quantity or that cause additional or unusual impacts to the City's park system will be required to provide contributions according to criteria and contribution rates that will be established in the Small Area Plan for the area(s) in which the development resides.
- C. **Private open space is a necessary and positive component of open space in new development projects.** Open space for the exclusive use of the occupants and visitors of a development is a desired open space use. Such private open space serves the needs of the residents, adds to their quality of life, and, when planned in coordination with the surrounding context, may reduce the impact of development on the public park system.
- D. **Above-grade open space can be a valuable contribution to on-site open space where it is able to fulfill several of the "roles":**
- Above-grade open space can provide valuable private open space for the occupants of a development. The amount of above grade open space that is allowed to contribute toward the required quantity of open space on a new development may vary based on the density of the zone, and may average 40-60% of the required open space, but vary widely by site.
 - Open space that is above a structure but accessible from a public area via a direct grade-level entrance on at least one side may be considered as on-grade open space.
- E. **Open space should be purposefully integrated into the site design and user services or facilities of the development.**
- The site and building design for new development will integrate the open space, including above-grade open space, into the design composition to ensure that the open space is a fundamental consideration in the planning and design. The creation of residual spaces that are converted to open space due to unsuitability for other uses is discouraged.
 - The open space(s) of a new development should have a goal or purpose to the space that will encourage its use and provide activities or quality-of-life benefits to the residents of the development.
- F. **Open space in new development should provide a physical and perceptual connection to its neighborhood.** The open space should inform the locations and configurations of the building(s) on a site to ensure that they address the neighborhood to provide a strong relationship to the character of the neighborhood.
- G. **Provide clear distinctions of the intended user group of a space.** The open space design should indicate whether a space is for the private residents, a mix of private and public, or publicly accessible, and provide clear transitions and boundaries between the different user areas.

- H. **Maximize the benefit of unique physical features and green infrastructure in the planning and programming of the open space.** Site requirements and existing features such as stormwater infrastructure, steep slopes, existing notable trees, and intermittent streams should be incorporated into the open space planning for the site from an early concept stage in order to positively integrate and protect these features.
- I. **Maximize green space.** Where fitting with the use and programming of the open space, new development should seek to maximize the amount of green space over paved or impervious space.
- J. **Increase the deterrence of crime through environmental design.** Use strategies to deter offenders and build a sense of community among residents so they can gain territorial control of areas and reduce opportunities for crime.

Open Space in New Development Next Steps

Based on the consideration and approval of the Shared Expectations for Open Space in New Development, a series of work efforts would be initiated to implement the content of these expectations. These work efforts may include the following.

A. Regulatory Changes

A process to alter the regulations contained in the zoning ordinance through text amendments would be initiated. The items that may be addressed include the following.

- Revision(s) to the definitions of open space
- Alteration of minimum dimensions of open space to reflect context
- Alteration of open space quantity requirements in high density and low density zones
- Allowance of above grade open space in all zones

B. Open Space Design Guidelines

The creation of guidelines is to ensure that open space in new development achieves the Shared Expectations. The guidelines would be an operational document that provides Staff and the Planning Commission with criteria to analyze open space in new development proposals. Potential guidelines are listed below.

- Ratio for above grade open space and quality parameters
- Integration of open space into the building form
- Provision of outdoor activities and programmed uses
- Integration of green infrastructure

C. Small Area Plan Coordination

Citywide plans, such as the Open Space Master Plan and Landscape Guidelines, and policy documents such as the Environmental Action Plan, provide guidance on expectations for public and publicly-accessible open space. Small Area Plans use those citywide plans and policies to provide more specific guidance for the provision of open space in development areas of the plan. Future Small Area Plans will be informed by the Shared Expectations.

PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE POLICY FRAMEWORK

Draft: April 11, 2019

This project aims to implement the Environmental Action Plan and Open Space Master Plan goal to **increase the publicly accessible open space quantity and improve its environmental quality, management, and social benefits.**

An Open Space Steering Committee will represent external stakeholders to provide policy guidance, as outlined below in the charge of work. The Steering Committee will be City Council approved and City Manager appointed. The Committee will be comprised of seven members, including:

- NVCT Alexandria Board Member
- PRC Member or designee
- Planning Commission Member or designee
- EPC Member or designee
- Beautification Commission Member or designee
- Archaeological Commission
- One at-large member

Action items will include re-assessment of the methodology, policies, and tools for evaluating future publicly accessible open space sites, whether through acquisition, easements, or development. Through this process, the work group will also evaluate the potential to increase the current open space ratio of 7.3 acres per 1,000 to 7.5 acres per 1,000. The Committee will sunset after completion of its charge of work, as outlined below.

WORK GROUP CHARGE OF WORK

1. Update the definition of “publicly accessible open space”
 - a. Provide a recommendation for updating and clarifying the definition of what types of publicly accessible open space (use, type, function, and extent of public accessibility) “counts” toward the City’s public open space goals. This would provide guidance on easement language (how much and what forms of public access must be provided for it to count) and future policy changes.
 - b. Provide a recommendation for updating the “Public Open Space” (POS) zone to reflect modern park and recreation functions, such as: play features, lighting (trail lighting, safety lighting, athletic lighting, etc), ballfield amenities, etc.
2. Evaluate methods of pursuing new publicly accessible open space.

- a. Develop criteria for considering opportunities for open space acquisition through the Open Space Fund (such as connectivity, walkability to neighborhood needs, access to water, etc.).
 - b. Develop minimum open space criteria for small area plans based on current and future demographic needs and neighborhood characteristics.
 - c. Evaluate the Open Space Ratio and/or other targets based on national standards and benchmarks for localities with similar densities.
3. Building on the work of the “Open Space in New Development” discussion, provide guidance for new development’s contribution to publicly accessible open space where it is not already guided by the small area plan, particularly to clarify:
- a. When new development is contributing to off-site publicly accessible open space;
 - b. What they are contributing toward and;
 - c. How a reasonable contribution from new development will be determined.

The charge of work is shown in a suggested order of sequence with the following rationale:

- 1. The definition of open space, will influence changes in items 2 and 3.
- 2. Item 2 will evaluate the overall context of new open space throughout the city based on demographics
- 3. New ratios and/or targets will be evaluated on the basis of general studies of public open space needs (and performance measures) here and in other communities/nationally, the City’s future population, and the cost/feasibility of achieving an increased goal through the current set of delivery systems

Item 3 provides guidance on how these goals will be implemented through the small area plans and, by extension, through the development review process.

GUIDING DOCUMENTS

1. Applicable action items from the [Open Space Master Plan \(2017\)](#):

- a. *Action:* Establish standardized contribution formulas for private developments that are not able to meet open space requirements on site for open space acquisition or for the improvement and maintenance of nearby parks: such contributions should be based on identified needs and area specific (i.e., within the Small Area Plan where development occurs); consider structure similar to Traffic Management Plans
- b. *Action:* Continue consideration of alternative metrics to the current standard of 7.3 acres of Public Open Space per 1,000 residents as the

proper tool used to assess the successful provision of protected open space to City of Alexandria residents

- c. *Action:* Formalize policy/guidelines and agreements for roof top open space available/usable by the public that may count toward the City's public open space goals
- d. *Action:* Establish formal procedure for documentation of recordation and require proof of recordation of easements prior to approval and release of site plan; develop a method or checklist to track progress of plans with commitments to public open space through the DSUP approval process
- e. *Action:* Continue to ensure that all new redevelopment areas and updates to Small Area Plans include connected open space areas, including local and regional open space networks
- f. *Action:* Protect existing open space in new development areas
- g. *Action:* Encourage the provision of open space for new large scale commercial development

2. **Applicable action items from the Phase One Environmental Action Plan (2018)**

- a. *Action:* Protect and add open space through acquisition, preservation, and conservation as prescribed in the Open Space Master Plan (updated 2017) and by FY2023, evaluate increasing the target to 7.5 acres per 1,000 residents. This includes, by 2020, City Council will reestablish the open space steering committee to re-assess the methodology, evaluate, and prioritize potential open space sites. Tools to be considered for open space preservation or restoration will include purchase, easements, or repurposing land as funds can be made available, development occurs, or partnerships can facilitate.
- b. *Action:* By FY2020, evaluate and update, using a public process, the requirements of open space on residential, commercial and mixed-use private development. Issues to be addressed include how to achieve meaningful and publicly accessible open space, particularly at the ground level, how to value developer contributions to off-site open space, how to minimize impervious surfaces, how to align vegetation requirements with canopy and native species goals described in Chapter 4.A.1. above; and, how to ensure consistency of open space requirements across similar zones.

Public Open Space Planning and Implementation

The City of Alexandria has established a system for the planning, acquisition and delivery of public open space that is consistent with its system for the planning, acquisition, and delivery of other public facilities and infrastructure, including transportation, sewer, fire stations, schools, affordable housing.

- Development and approval of a **Citywide master plan** for the public facility in question. Example master plans include the Transportation Master Plan, the Open Space Master Plan, the Housing Master Plan, the Strategic Facilities Plan, etc. These are developed with an interdepartmental team with considerable public input.
- During the **small area planning** process, these citywide master plans guide the planning for public facility needs within the small area plan boundary. When needed, specific studies are completed at the small area plan level to ensure that public facility needs are understood. The small area plan includes recommendations for public facilities, including, in the case of open space, a specific open space strategy that typically includes:
 - Review of open space needs in the area,
 - Specific sites in the area for potential acquisition or protection for use as shared public open space – parks, trails, etc.
 - Open space requirements for new development, including recommendations for on-site open space and contributions from new development toward shared open space.
 - Small area plans may be general or specific. For example, plans such as North Potomac Yard, Braddock Metro, Oakville Triangle, and South Patrick Street have very specific recommendations regarding open space while Eisenhower West is more general, in keeping with an overall desire for the Eisenhower West Plan to be flexible.

These are developed with an interdepartmental team with considerable public input.

- During the **development review** process -- rezonings (often Coordinated Development Districts) and Development Special Use Permits, the specific open space provided on-site by an individual development project, as well as any contribution to off-site open space, is determined following the guidelines established by the Citywide plan and the relevant small area plan. At this time, specific site opportunities and constraints can be taken into account. When the interdepartmental team reviews proposed development projects, they take into account how the combination of plan goals, zoning requirements, and site

characteristics should shape the amount and mix of open space types on-site, as well as contributions to shared open space in the neighborhood. The on-site mix can include (1) publicly-accessible open space on private land, (2) open space that is visible to the public (such as yards or setbacks) that may not be publicly-accessible, and (3) open space restricted for the use of residents, employees or customers of the new development.

- Open space has been acquired by the City outside of the development review process, including through the open space fund. The open space fund acquired half of a planned park in Braddock, and acquired waterfront parking lots along the Strand.
- Open space acquired by the City enters the park system and must be **managed and maintained** by the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities.



LAND USE AND OPEN SPACE



Introduction is under development.

4 Land Use and Open Space

4.1 TREE CANOPY

GOAL

Preserve and expand a healthy urban tree canopy

TARGET

By FY2035, average overall tree canopy is a minimum of 40 percent

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

4.1.1

By FY2023, update and coordinate the Urban Forestry Master Plan, Environmental and Sustainability Management System (ESMS), and Landscape Guidelines (updated in FY2019) to support increased tree preservation, expansion, maintenance, native species, and a revised tree canopy coverage goal.

Cost Estimate: \$40,000 per year

Cost Breakdown: \$30,000–\$40,000 per year. \$30,000 for the yearly tree inventory study plus \$10,000 for the tree canopy survey scheduled for every three years. Existing staff resources are accounted for in current budget.



4.1.2

By FY2023, enlist City partnerships (community groups) to provide education and outreach that support technical assistance and opportunities to increase native tree canopy coverage on private property.

Cost Estimate: Existing staff resources

Cost Breakdown: Existing staff resources are accounted for in current budget.



4.1.3

By FY2028, develop an urban forest health index rating system to determine the current and ongoing health and health needs of the urban forest in Alexandria.

Cost Estimate: \$100,000

Cost Breakdown: one-time cost



4.1.4

By FY2028, develop a program that supports the planting of trees on private property, commit funding to establish the program and support ongoing implementation.

Cost Estimate: \$25,000/year





LONG-TERM ACTIONS

Update the Urban Forestry Master Plan ten (10) years after approval in 2019.

4.1.5

By FY2029, update the Urban Forestry Master Plan to support increased tree preservation, expansion, maintenance, native species, and a revised tree canopy coverage goal.

Cost Estimate: \$30,000

Cost Breakdown: one-time cost



4.2 OPEN SPACE

GOAL

Increase open space quantity and improve the environmental quality, management, and social benefits of open space.

TARGET

Maintain the ratio of 7.3 acres of publicly accessible open space per 1,000 residents.

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

4.2.1

By FY2023, protect and add open space through acquisition, preservation, and conservation as prescribed in the Open Space Master Plan (updated 2017) and by FY2023, evaluate increasing the target to 7.5 acres per 1,000 residents. This includes, by FY2020, City Council will re-establish the open space steering committee to re-assess the methodology, evaluate, and prioritize potential open space sites. Tools to be considered for open space preservation or restoration will include purchase, easements, or repurposing land as funds can be made available, development occurs, or partnerships can facilitate.

Cost Estimate: The proposed FY20-29 CIP provides \$13,175,000 for Open Space acquisition and development. Any proposed changes to this funding will be evaluated through the Open Space Steering Committee's action findings.

Cost Breakdown: The action is also dependent on the development envisioned in small area plans, including city investments, developer contributions, and private philanthropic contributions.



4.2.2

By FY2023, increase the percentage of acres of public natural lands that are actively managed, including restoration and invasive species removal, by 50 percent (450 acres).

Cost Estimate: Existing staff resources



4.2.3

By FY2020, evaluate and update, using a public process, the requirements of open space on residential, commercial and mixed-use private development. Issues to be addressed include how to achieve meaningful and publicly accessible open space, particularly at the ground level; how to value developer contributions to off-site open space; how to minimize impervious surfaces; how to align vegetation requirements with canopy and native species goals in the Landscape Guidelines; and; how to ensure consistency of open space requirements across similar zones.

Cost Estimate: Existing staff resources



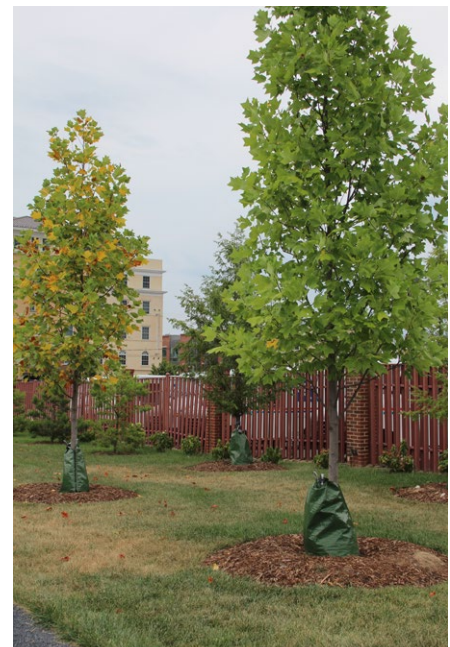
MID-TERM ACTIONS

4.2.4

By FY2028, identify tools and techniques through stream valley plans to maintain and enhance all of the City's stream valleys including public access points for ecological and recreational benefits The plans will be updated every 10 years.

Cost Estimate: \$250,000/10 years (new request)

Cost Breakdown: Based on previous similar plans. Note, however, that this does not include plan implementation, which will be determined based on findings of the plan.





MID-TERM ACTIONS

4.2.5

By FY2028, seek publicly accessible open space opportunities in unconventional spaces:

- a. Further evaluate the City's network of public alleys and define those most appropriate for informal recreational use and/or green infrastructure improvements.
- b. Work with Northern Virginia Conservation Trust to identify potential locations for conservations easements, particularly those that would connect or are adjacent to existing open spaces
- c. Identify and map opportunities to re-purpose public rights-of-way and parking lots for other public-serving uses, including interim and/or permanent recreational use and open space, affordable housing, schools, or other public facilities.
- d. Protect and preserve institutional open space by:
 - i. Pursuing easements for trails and/or ecosystem corridors through institutional space to connect with public open space
 - ii. Develop mechanisms, possibly including incentives and processes for public/private partnerships to maintain and enhance natural areas on institutional land

Cost Estimate: \$60,000/year (part of approved CIP)

Cost Breakdown: The City currently holds a contract with Northern Virginia Conservation Trust to advise on open space concerns and these action items can be added to our joint work plan.



Findings of the Open Space and Private Development Study, an EAP short-term action scheduled for completion in June 2019, will inform EAP mid-term actions. The study includes an investigation into issues of visibility/accessibility of open space in private development, the provision of rooftop open space, impervious cover, and characteristics of successful open space.

As noted in the short-term action items, the City will establish an Open Space Steering Committee within the next year. The Committee will be charged with re-assessing the methodology, policies, and tools for evaluating future publicly accessible open space sites, whether through acquisition, easements, or development. Through this process, the work group will also evaluate the potential to increase the current open space ratio of 7.3 acres per 1,000 to 7.5 acres per 1,000. The findings of the Steering Committee will also direct mid- and long-term actions.

Long-term Action

Actions may be proposed as a result of the Open Space and Private Development Study in June 2019

Legislative Priorities

Actions may be proposed as a result of the Open Space and Private Development Study in June 2019

Accountable Parties

Planning and Zoning; Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities; Transportation and Environmental Services